

## **INCREASING SALES BY BUILDING TRUST**

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Your success, and that of your sales staff, often depends on how well you have built a relationship with your frontline people. Much of your job as a sales supervisor or manager involves coaching, setting a motivating work environment, and providing regular performance feedback to your employees. Often, the degree to which your guidance is successful depends on how well your employees feel you satisfy their needs. It is not enough to simply stress and encourage increased productivity and effort by your employees in order to meet established goals or quotas. They need to understand how their initiatives will benefit them and the organization. Employees will ask the question what is the "**Added Value And Results For Me**" (**AVAR-FM**)? If you cannot, or do not, answer that question effectively you may create unnecessary frustration and discontent. And, in today's low unemployment business environment that could be costly from a staffing perspective.

### **THE BASIS FOR TRUST**

From a trust-building perspective, you must be conscious that one of your key responsibilities is your staff. They are the vehicle through which you and the organization either succeeds or fails.

To help them perform at peak levels, you must work to establish trust with them. One way to accomplish this is by consistently striving to gain cooperation and obtain a commitment to perform at or above standard levels.

As your relationship with your staff evolves, you should continue to do "reality checks" by giving and gathering feedback in order to stay in tune with them and ensure that you are providing the AVARFM they desire.

### **STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING TRUST**

Trust is not a mandatory condition of employment when someone joins your staff. Although desirable, employees cannot be made to trust you and vice versa. Trust must be earned through sincere, open words and actions over a period of time. You must often show that you trust your employees in order to have them reciprocate.

It is helpful to remember that "adults are just kids with big bodies!" They learned behavior as children that they repeat as adults in the workplace. As a child, if they learned that adults (AKA bosses) cannot be trusted, you will have an uphill battle trying to win them over.

Because you are the manager, most employees will have confidence in you and expect you to perform your job effectively and professionally. It is your responsibility to prove that

their trust is not unfounded and that you are capable of doing your job. Only then does the trust start to develop.

The following are some strategies for helping build trust:

- *Communicate openly.* One way to demonstrate your trust is to share information freely and quickly. If you or someone higher makes a decision that impacts employees, and it is not confidential or damaging, pass the information on. It is human nature for people to want to be in on decisions that affect them. Adults also generally have a need to feel control over their environment. It's part of the maturation process. As they grew, they were hopefully given additional responsibility and opportunities. As such, they have likely come to expect that they will experience similar circumstances from their boss in the workplace. By sharing information and feedback, while at the same time encouraging open dialog from the members of your team, you can help foster a reciprocal work environment.
- *Set a positive example.* Too often, managers take a "do as I say; not as I do," approach to leadership. This didn't work well for your employees whose parents tried it when they were children, and it likely will get short-termed results now that they are on your team. Be up front with your staff and treat them as the professionals that they are.

It is important for you to model the behavior and work ethic you want others to follow. If you demand long hours of commitment to reach those end of month quotas, you should be willing to pitch in or support employee efforts. Additionally, if you preach the need for ethical behavior and the delivery of quality customer service, you should be modeling that for them.

- *Communicate effectively and convincingly.* It does not matter how much you know, or think you know; if you can not communicate your knowledge to others, you will not be effective in convincing them to believe you. Nor will you be effective in coaching and assisting them on the job.

From a trust-building perspective, a key in communicating is to provide more than simple facts or figures. Project your feelings as you communicate. This also helps you appear to be more human and approachable and demonstrates empathy for employees.

- *Display concern for others.* By placing emphasis on helping others rather than on yourself, you can show that your focus is not just meeting quotas. Remember that if your employees don't feel valued, they won't stick around to help you meet those numbers!

Being available and willing to assist when necessary shows that you have the goodwill of others in mind. It also sets an environment where employees feel comfortable and safe coming to you when things are not going so well or when they have ideas for improvement. This could help solidify relationships and could prevent future problems with employees. For example, assume you are a Hispanic male supervisor and have a solid working relationship with your team members. At some point, a decision is made to downsize and a white forty-five year old female salesperson with low production rates is terminated. If she feels that you have been fair with her, and you have effectively provided regular, specific and on-going feedback throughout her tenure, she may be less inclined to seek legal assistance for discrimination. Especially, if you have provided assistance in helping her develop skills over the period of her employment.

- *Keep your word.* If you tell an employee you will or will not do something, follow up as you said you would. Failure to do so sends a message that you cannot be depended upon, or that you are not truthful.

Think of how you felt when someone promised something that they did not deliver. How did you feel? Your employees will likely react in a similar fashion if you treat them that way. And once their trust level is decreased, it may be hard or impossible to recover.

- *Be fair.* Nothing will turn others against you faster than showing that you are inconsistent in your treatment of people. Assist, reward, coach, counsel and punish equitably in order to avoid problems and resentment. Remember the example of the forty-five year old female salesperson earlier? We live in a very litigious society. It is so easy for someone to take you to court for discrimination whether actual discrimination has occurred or not. Keep in mind that perceptions are reality; if someone perceives you discriminated, you will often need to prove otherwise.
- *Admit you are wrong or do not know.* Another easy way to build trust is to say "I'm sorry," "I made a mistake," or "I was wrong." People generally warm up to those who appear human; unless you make errors a regular practice. After all, to err or not have all the answers is human.

You can also often win someone over by appealing to him or her for help. But, do so in a sincere manner and not just to make him/her feel needed. Otherwise, they may suspect paternalism and could be incensed.

Additionally, once you acknowledge a mistake, take immediate steps to resolve the issue and to get the employee or customer back to where they are "whole." That is

where they would have been if the mistake had not occurred. It may even be necessary to make additional concessions or provide a little extra to recover trust and to show a sincere effort to fix the situation.

- *Display high ethical standards.* You should demonstrate a strong work and moral ethic to encourage similar actions by your staff. Qualities such as truth, honesty, fairness, and professionalism should be a daily part of your behavior. These are qualities often cited when someone points to an effective, or ineffective, leader. Ask yourself on a daily basis, what am I doing to display these behaviors to my employees and customers?
- *Foster a "team player" image.* You cannot do it all yourself. Neither can anyone else. Today's business world is evolving and automating rapidly. Consumers are smarter, better educated and have a level of sophistication far superior to those of the past. To compete effectively and to dominate requires a melding of human resources. Training and coaching are key elements in helping your team attain and maintain an advanced level of performance.

Additionally, your active role as part of the team can help encourage your staff. By rolling up your sleeves to help during a crunch period, or taking the time to mentor a newer staff member, you can say volumes about your leadership style. Something as simple as periodically coordinating a team activity, luncheon, or after work get together can go a long way in building strong working relationships.

- *Share the spotlight.* Nothing turns people off faster than a leader hoarding praise or recognition, especially when it comes as the result of someone else's efforts. Give credit for achievements of employees and never take credit for something accomplished by others.

As a manager, your satisfaction should come from the successful performance of your team. Your goal should be to provide an environment in which they can be successful. In so doing, you also succeed. By modifying and applying the concept offered on the old Vidal Sassoon shampoo commercial from years ago -- "If they don't look you, you don't look good" --- you can help set an environment of collaboration.

## **WHY IS TRUST SO IMPORTANT?**

The bottom line...if you don't have trust, you don't have a relationship! Trust is such a pivotal issue in dealing with others that it should be sought after, cherished and protected at all costs. If your employees don't trust you, you can't lead effectively; if you don't trust your employees, you can't grow internal talent and foster a sound working environment; and, if your customers do not have trust in you and/or your employees, you're on your

way out of business!

Generally, when employees trust their bosses, they are likely to perform at a higher level, feel more secure in their job, work more cohesively with co-workers, customers and their boss, and communicate more openly. They are also less inclined to hide information or act out through tardiness and absenteeism.

When customers trust in you and your organization, they keep coming back and they recommend your services and/or products to others.

With the potential benefits extracted from a trusting environment, doesn't it seem worth working toward? Think about your own workplace. Are employees happy, effective, efficient, communicating openly, and working to do more than their share? Or, is there a lot of complaining and rumors, low productivity, poor morale, and reluctance to volunteer when needed? If the latter, what have you done lately to provide a forum for individual and/or venting of issues, concerns, or questions? There are many ways to collect and disseminate information. Some options are one-on-one interviews, employee/customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, brainstorming sessions, questionnaires, coaching/counseling sessions, performance appraisal interviews, and team meetings.

## **FACTORS IMPACTING TRUST**

Many things which you do have an effect on whether or not people trust you. Here are some possibilities:

- *Decision-making.* The manner in which you make, or fail to make, decisions sends a powerful message about your commitment to the organization, your team members and others around you. Before making a decision, determine desired outcomes, gather and analyze facts, consider alternatives and possible results and consult with others, if necessary. Also, be sure to consider how your decision will impact others within and outside your team.

A quick way to destroy peer trust and confidence is to make a decision that seems to benefit your group, but creates challenges for others. For example, say you are the manager of Team A and your team has been exceeding production quotas. Without consulting other team managers, you decide to authorize "dress down" days on Monday and Friday since those are days when your team members stay in the office and make telephone sales calls or handle administrative functions. The members of Team B have been given a new product line that requires them to be out with clients five days a week so they cannot wear casual business attire. Team B's manager is now receiving complaints of unfairness from her team members because they don't get to dress down.

In effect your good intentions have created friction within another work team. This in turn can affect the relationship you have with your peers.

When making decisions, at least inform or consult with others who might be impacted so that they can prepare a response for questions from their team members.

- *Timing.* Develop sound relationships with employees, peers and your boss. If you typically find yourself saying, "I'll coach, call, or have lunch with them later," you may find it difficult to regain lost opportunities for developing a strong interpersonal relationship because you postponed contact. A few minutes invested in the Café or on a stairway sharing information or talking about someone's weekend may return a myriad of benefits later.

Also, keep in mind what you read earlier about perceptions. Spend an equitable amount of time building relationships so you aren't perceived as biased or uncaring. This is especially important if you have been promoted from within your organization and have in the past "hung out" with certain team members. As manager, you must shift from a micro view (one-on-one relationships) to a macro view (team relationships). If you only go to lunch or on break with one or two people, or if you stop after work to have a drink with friends within the team, you could be headed for trouble. Not only you, but also your organization could suffer in the long run if someone perceives you're showing favoritism. A rule of thumb is that if you're going on break with one, you'd better make an effort to go with all.

- *Personal Characteristics.* Various aspects of your personality also affect the way others view you:
  - Communication style
  - Beliefs
  - Honesty
  - Initiative
  - Ability to follow through
  - Values
  - Sincerity
  - Truthfulness
  - Devotion
  - Fairness

It is your responsibility to decide how you want to be perceived and work toward meeting that vision.

- *Demeanor.* The way in which you approach others (direct/indirect/both) can determine their response or reaction to you. By knowing about personality style preferences for yourself and others, you can often avoid conflicts or misunderstandings. This knowledge can be gained through use of personality style profile questionnaires available on the market (Personal Profile System, Myers-Briggs,

Social Style Indicator, or similar). It is especially effective to have knowledge of the results of another person's style profile when interacting with them. This allows you to acknowledge their preferences or tendencies.

An important fact to keep in mind related to personality styles is that you cannot change the style(s) of others; you can only modify your behavior to address theirs.

- *Feedback.* Your ability, desire and skill in delivering regular, timely and honest feedback is crucial in building trust with others. By avoiding game playing or the perception that you either do not care, or are a "yes" person you stimulate others' confidence in you.
- *Environment.* A final factor that affects relationships is the environment. If you create or foster an environment that stifles creativity, achievement, rewards and communication, you will negatively impact morale, self-esteem, efficiency, and productivity.

There are many books out on the market these days regarding rewarding and motivating employees. To find them go to bookstore chain and peruse their business section. You can also go onto the Internet and type in employee motivation to find hundreds of sources.

It is important to maintain trust through an on-going process of communication and interaction. And as this article indicates, trust is sometimes difficult to attain. But once you have it, there's no limit to what you and your employees can do together!

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